

## **ROLE OF PRESS IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT – A CASE STUDY OF INDIA (NEWSPAPER)**

**R. Sakthivel**

Ph.D., Research Scholar (F.T.), Dept., of Historical Study, Madurai Kamraj University, Madurai.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The turn of the twentieth century, however saw definite changes in the tone of the native press. In this situation S.N.Thirumalachari decided to publish a Tamil periodical India on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1906. Apart from fiery article and songs, the periodical published cartoons arguably the earliest in the Indian language press. India's writings made great impact on the national movement and increased the political knowledge of the ordinary people and openly criticized the injustice measures of the British Government and support the left wing of the Congress. A perusal of some of the important editorials, notes, articles and reports that appeared in the India newspaper gives us a clear idea that it showed the new approach to the problems faced by the people and contributed to the growth and consolidation of the views of the radicals in Tamil Nadu. The Madras government systematically scrutinized India's writings, and forward to the Government of India. The British Government ordered the Postal and Revenue Department to forfeit India's issue and ban any money order being sent to the India office in Pondicherry. So India office had to suffer financially. Then the British Government curtailed the area of circulation of India. Thus as a result the India paper crushed by the British Government in 1910.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Indian journals had been a tool of struggle against the continuing repressive measures of the British rulers over a long period of time, right from the beginning of 1870 when James Hicky published *Bengal Gazette*. During the freedom movement, some leading papers had their printing machines confiscated and security deposits forfeited repeatedly for defying the repressive laws against the press.

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The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 further strengthened the nationalist aspirations of the Indian people. Most prominent members of the Indian Congress were eminent journalists and editors of newspapers. These included such towering personalities as Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade and Narendranath Sen. The Indian language press was particularly strong in expressing its views against the British government. A perusal of the history of the press reveals the fact that the majority of the vernacular press in Madras was loyal and harmless as far as the government was concerned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The turn of the twentieth century, however saw definite changes in the tone of the native press. The first such defiant sign among the journalists surfaced around 1900. It is pointed out that by 1900, 1359 newspapers and journals reached an estimated two millions of subscribers of which over 200 newspapers commented on the political issues, most of these, according to British observers, tended to be disloyal or pursued dangerous editorial policies. The new writers wrote with a vehemence and dedication on the necessity of adopting violent method to liberate the country. Thus, the press of the said period represented the emergence of a new thinking force.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, popular journals like the Swaraj, The Hindu and the Swadesamitran were published from Chennai. They adopted a modest approach towards the Government measures. In this situation S.N.Thirumalachari, born in a wealthy Mandayam family decided to publish a periodical in Tamil.

This intention led to the publication of the Tamil periodical India. The first issue of the periodical appeared on 6th May 1906 with a notice that it would be published on every Wednesday. Later, the paper notified that it would be published on every Saturday. S.N. Thirumalachariyar was the proprietor and Murappakkam Seenivasan Aiyangaar served as the editor of the paper. In the beginning, India didn't publish any political article and the paper started to publish political articles only from 7th July of 1906. The India paper consisted of 16 pages, with half grown size (38cmx26cm). After 1908 the paper was published with 8 pages and with crown size (53cmx26cm).

## **CARTOONS**

Apart from fiery article and songs, the periodical also published cartoons arguably the earliest in the Indian language press. Apart from the cartoons, which Bharati personally supervised, he also often wrote very detailed, commentaries. The picture which India carried every week on the front page described metaphorically some important political event of the week. This was a very effective political weapon as it created the effect as well as the government's prohibition against the publication and stated that 'A very favourite method of disseminating their views to publish cartoon which always represented European a harsh, cruel, villains or situations calculated to induce derision'.

## **SUPPORT THE EXTREMIST MOVEMENT**

The Partition of Bengal in October 1905 helped the New Party to escalate their propaganda more vigorously. The Swadeshi Movement which gained momentum in the post-partition of Bengal period was utilized by the Extremists not only as a moral training in self-help, determination and sacrifice but also as a weapon of political agitation. The

political philosophy of B.G. Tilak, B.C. Pal, Aurobindo Ghose and Lala Lajpat Rai were the source of great inspiration to the nationalists of Tamilnadu. The Mandayam family, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Bharati and Subramania Siva were the propagator of the doctrine of the New Movement in Tamilnadu. India the nationalist journal gave wide publicity to the doctrine of the New Movement. The India paper supported the formation of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in Tuticorin in October 1906. The periodical supported the efforts of the Swadeshi Movement and criticised the action of the local officials for creating difficulties to the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company.

The Zamindar of Ettayapuram was criticized by India for sending one of his men to pull up a tailor who had the word 'Vande Mataram' inscribed in his shop. The Principal of Madura College was criticised for his hostile attitude towards the nationalists. The periodical also commended papers like Punjabee published from Lahore and Pradodh published from Satara as they stood against the government. V.V.S. Aiyar served as the London correspondent of the India paper. V.V.S. Aiyar wrote the history of Garibaldi's in Tamil, an article on Rousseau's social contract and sent it for publication to India. Likewise, India also published the life history of Rani Laxmi Bai and Madanlal Dhingra.

From the India office, many pamphlets and booklets were published about the Swadeshi propaganda and speeches of the extremists. The famous speech of Tilak on the 'Tenets of the New party' at the College Square in Calcutta was translated into Tamil by Subramania Bharati and published in February 1907. It was printed at the India Printing Works, Broadway, and the same place where India periodical was printed. The Speeches of B.C. Pal (in Madras), Life of Aurobindo Ghosh and Congress Yatra were printed and distributed from India newspaper office press. Over 7000 copies of B.C. Pal's speeches were reported to have been printed and distributed in 1907.

## **CRITICIZE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MEASURES**

The British Government blocks every reasonable effort of the people to attain Swaraj. The Government takes the following suppressive measures, i) legislation curtailing the normal rights of the individuals; ii) Effects of the Press Act; iii) Prosecution for sedition; iv) Deportation without trial.

Five acts were passed between November 1907 and August 1910 curtailing the normal rights of the citizen. They were the Public Meeting Act, the Indian Press Act, the Seditious Meeting Act, the Explosive Substances Act and the Newspaper Offences Act. The Government issued several ordinances abrogating the rights of free speech and free criticism. Meetings, processions and demonstrations were banned. Some of the most outstanding leaders were singled out for deportation without trial. Aswinkumar Dutta was deported on the recommendation of the Government of East Bengal and Assam. Madan Lal Dhingra, the killer of Curzon Wylie, was hanged and Bhupendranath Datta, the Editor of Yugantar was sentenced to a long-term of imprisonment. Thus, by a series of repressive measures the Government suppressed the nationalist movement.

India, the patriotic newspaper warned the British Government if the suppressive measures continued which led India as Russia and wrote: "Even now, if the Government would refrain from meddling with the lawful efforts of the people to attain liberty, no serious harm could befall any one. If, instead of this, it acts on bad counsel and arrogantly

provoked the people like the Russian Government, India too would soon become another Russia.

## INDIA CASE

In the mid of 1907, the Government of India empowered the Madras Government to institute proceedings against the newspapers publishing seditious writings. At the beginning of 1908, anti-imperialist stirrings reached a critical point. There were clashes between the Government and the people. The Government was particularly concerned with the growth of the vernacular press and its ability to reach quite a large section of the population. To prevent the publication of 'seditious' articles, the British government introduced many Press Acts. The Special Branch systematically scrutinized India periodical and other vernacular journals to record seditious writings, and forward to the Government of India. In 1907, the Special Branch described as India, a newly started publication, was found expressing its views 'rather strongly'.

The Commissioner of Police wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras on 24 June 1908, about prosecuting India's editor saying that 'pages in India have been declared to be most objectionable by the Advocate General who is of the opinion that the newspaper can be run under sections, 124 A & 153A of the India Penal Code. The editor, proprietor printer and publisher of this Tamil journal is one M. Sreenivasa Iyengar.'

The authorities of the Madras Government instituted the criminal proceedings against M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, the Editor, Proprietor, Printer and Publisher of the India paper under sections 124-A, 153 A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code in respect of the following articles published in **India** newspaper on the dates noted opposite each article:

Date of issue	Heading as given in the reports on Vernacular and Anglo-Vernacular newspapers	Heading given in the newspaper itself
29-2-1908	The press prosecution in Calcutta	The holy order
29-2-1908	"Swadeshi and Whites"	A Swadeshi lecture
7-3-1908	An exhortation to Sri Krishna	Prayer to Sri Krishna,
21-3-1908	'I dare'	'I dare'
28-3-1908	Two types of civilization... fiendish and Godly	Two types of civilization... .. fiendish and Godly.
21-3-1908	Madras Native Newspapers Reports, p. 213.	The affection of the people to the patriots.
21-3-1908	The situation in Tinnelvely and Tuticorin.	Our Cartoon
21-3-1908	The British Government Half Trader, Half Ruler.	Half Trader-Half Ruler
April, 1908	The Commissioner of Police and Vande Mataram	Vande Madaram is piercing the ears.
April, 1908	Sedition scening by Government	One who tests the bullock has an eye everywhere in forest.

April, 1908	Temperance work poor	Reforms of Government No.1. one must become a big drunkard.
25-4-1908	Justice is not for the Indian	It is so beautiful.
25-4-1908	Is even play a crime?	Are you also to play
25-4-1908	The four fold duties of a King	Duty of a King.
2-5-1908	Keep up your old institution	You are preparing the way for your ruin.
2-5-1908	Justice under the British Government.	Stones from the Mahabarata
23-5-1908	Madras Native Newspapers Reports, para-16.	The crusade against the newspapers by the Bombay Government.
23-5-1908	Madras Native Newspapers Reports, para, 15.	One of several robberies.
June, 1908	Madras Native Newspapers Reports, para, 15.	The Economic Swadeshi.
June, 1908	Madras Native Newspapers Report	Why lose time

On 21 and 22 August of 1908, the Police searched the India office and seized the list of articles. On the same day, the Government launched proceedings against Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar responsible for publishing seditious articles. Srinivasa Iyengar was convicted on 13 November 1908. The special Jury unanimously returned a verdict of guilty against the accused under the section 124 A of Indian Penal Code. The Judge agreed with the verdict and sentenced the accused to five years transportation on 14 November 1908. The British government made no mention and no warrant was issued against M.P.Tirumalachariya in the India case. But the Government investigated M.P. Tirumalachariya in connection with the Tamil paper India. Frustrated at their failure to net M.P.T. Acharya, the British Government concentrated their efforts on **India's** publication. The Government was ready to prepare proceedings against the extremist journals published from Pondicherry.

## PUBLISHED FROM PONDICHERRY

The revolutionary newspaper India resumed its publication on 10th October 1908 from the French controlled Pondicherry. On the top of the front page words Liberty, Egalite, Fraternité; with their equivalents in Tamil was published. The front page carried an illustration which is supposed to represent the progress of truth being stopped by the moderates with the chain of convention. Subramania Bharati was registered as the legal editor of India and M.P. Tirumalachari as the proprietor and publisher of the paper till November 1908. Then, the proprietorship changed to S.Srinivasachari, the proprietor of a print agency in Broadway. He was also be President of the Chennai Jana Sangam his sympathies were known to be anti-British.

The India was commented on the British administration in very strong terms. Subramania Bharati's editing was very imaginative and the magazine took an almost entirely political appearance. The periodical dealt with important subjects written in a



pleasant style. Among the Tamil newspapers the Swadesamitran had the largest circulation (2,620) and the India followed with 1,500. From Pondicherry, India published political articles without fear of British Government. The circulation increased in and around Pondicherry because of the article written by Subramania Bharati and his unique feature of using cartoons to narrate the political events which attracted the attention of the people.

### **TROUBLE MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT**

The India published political articles without the fear of British suppressive action from Pondicherry. In the mean time, the British Police keenly watched the activities of the New Party leaders in Pondicherry and their journals. The Government frequently sent their spies to watch India's Editor C.Subramania Bharati and his fiery writings. The British Government ordered the Postal Department and Revenue Department to forfeit India's issue and ban any money order being sent from the British India to the India office in Pondicherry.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 1910 the Government promulgated the Indian Press Act 1910. It was more rigid than the previous legislation. The British Government took action in respect of the India and Suryodayam under Sections of 13 and 15 of the Press Act 1910. The Advocate General P.S. Sivamani Aiyar listed out the following India newspaper articles as seditious in nature. There was article published in the India issues dated 28 November 1909, 5,12,16,19 December 1909, 2,6,13, January 1910 and 12 February 1910.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1910, the British Government ordered that the newspaper entitled India published in Tamil language and now printed at Pondicherry had published in its issue of 12<sup>th</sup> February 1910, matter which invite action under the provisions of the Indian Press Act, 1910. The Governor in Council was pleased to declare in 'exercise of the powers conferred by section 12(1) of Indian Press Act, 1910 that *India* was forfeited to his Majesty'.

The British Government gave maximum trouble to India's publication. The money order could not properly reach India office from the British India. So India office had to suffer financially. Then the British Government curtailed the area of circulation of India and warned India's subscribers in British India. Consequently the quantum circulation very much reduced in the beginning of March 1910. Almost the regular publication was stopped. Thus as a result of the repressive measures of the British Government, the India periodical.

### **CONCLUSION**

A perusal of some of the important editorials, notes, articles and reports that appeared in the India newspaper gives us a clear idea that it showed the new approach to the problems faced by the people and contributed to the growth and consolidation of the views of the radicals in Tamil Nadu. The paper had close contact with the Extremist leaders and their publication. India fully supported the activities of the prominent Extremist leaders like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh. The paper gave wide publicity to B.C.Pal's visit in April 1907 to Tamil Nadu and published the speeches of B.C.Pal. As a result, the political atmosphere in Madras underwent a dramatic change. It was the traditional custodian of political agitation.

India newspaper had made significant contribution to the Swadeshi development in Tamilnadu. The paper said that the Indians had a powerful weapon in boycott by which they could force the authorities to grant independence. As a result, the people of Tamilnadu boycotted the foreign cloths and conducted strikes in foreign owned industries, and the Abel circus and the product of foreign owned industries faced bitter experience caused by the boycott movement. As the Swadeshi movement gathered momentum, India succeeded in creating an emotional relationship between the readers and the newspaper.

The editor of India, Subramania Bharati published patriotic songs and his writings inspired confidence among the students and stressed the establishment of Swadeshi Schools, Colleges and National Education throughout Tamilnadu. Consequently students sang the national song and shouted Vande Mataram in the streets. The paper gave wide publicity to raising funds for Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company. India also stood on the side of working class and supported the strike in Coral Mill.

India's writings made great impact on the national movement and educated the common people. The paper criticised the suppressive measures of the British government like impartial judgments of the Judicial Department, banning of the Indian press, illegal arrest of the national leaders and the fallacious activities of the police. India wrote about the worsening economic situation, expensive taxation, inadequate famine relief measures and insensitive exploitative administration of the British in India. As a result, the people of Tamilnadu realized the brutal activities of the British government and were ready to fight against the government and India wrote: "we should be prepared to die rather than lead the lives of slaves here after". Thus, the India periodical carved out a place of permanence in the heart of the nationalists.

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